

Message Text

SECRET

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5397

AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

S E C R E T CAIRO 810

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OCLR, EG, VS

SUBJECT: GOE REQUEST FOR HELP IN OVERFLIGHT OF SOUTH VIETNAM

REF: SAIGON 2139

1. IN VIEW FONMIN FAHMY'S ABSENCE AND BUI DIEM'S IMMINENT DEPARTURE, I THOUGHT IT BEST INQUIRE INFORMALLY AND WITHOUT DELAY OF UNDERSEC MOHAMED RIAD IF GOE WOULD BE PREPARED GIVE BUI DIEM A VISA TO ENABLE HIM TRANSIT CAIRO ENROUTE TO WASHINGTON. I TOLD RIAD THAT USG HAS SOUGHT TO BE HELPFUL TO GOE IN WHAT I WAS SURE HE RECOGNIZED TO BE A DELICATE SITUATION AND THAT AMB MARTIN HAD DISCUSSED THE EGYPTIAN REQUEST WITH RVN FONMIN. I HAD BEEN SURPRISED TO LEARN FROM AMB MARTIN THAT THE SUBJECT HAD APPARENTLY ALREADY BEEN RAISED WITH RVN EMBASSY IN LONDON AND BY AN EGYPTIAN AIRLINES OFFICIAL WHO VISITED SAIGON. RVN RESPONSE TO THESE EARLIER OVERTURES, AS I UNDERSTOOD IT, HAD BEEN NON-COMMITTAL. AS I HAD EARLIER TOLD HIM, SO LONG AS GOE RECOGNIZES PRG, IT IS DIFFICULT FOR RVN TO RESPOND POSITIVELY. HOWEVER, IF EGYPTIANS WOULD PERMIT AMB BUI DIEM TO TRANSIT CAIRO AND TALK WITH HIM HERE, IT MIGHT INITIATE A DIALOGUE WHICH COULD EVENTUALLY BE MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL. IF GOE WOULD FIND IT EMBARRASSING TO RECEIVE BUI DIEM FORMALLY, I WOULD BE PLEASED TO ARRANGE AN INFORMAL MEETING AT MY RESIDENCE. I ALSO NOTED ESTABLISHMENT OF SAUDI-RVN RELATIONS IS BEING ANNOUNCED TODAY.

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2. RIAD RECOGNIZED AWKWARDNESS OF SITUATION. HE SAID

NEITHER HE NOR FAHMY HAD BEEN AWARE OF THE PREVIOUS EGYPTIAN OVERTURES. HE WOULD GET IN TOUCH WITH THE MINISTER OF AVIATION TO ASK ABOUT EGYPTIAN AIRLINES APPROACH AND REMONSTRATE THAT FOREIGN MINISTRY SHOULD HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF ANY SUCH APPROACH. HE WOULD ALSO SAY TO THE MINISTER OF AVIATION THAT THE SUBJECT IS NOT SIMPLY A FINANCIAL OR ECONOMIC QUESTION, BUT A POLITICAL ONE. IT CANNOT BE RESOLVED IN TWO WEEKS OR SO. A SOLUTION, IF ONE MATERIALIZES, WILL TAKE MUCH LONGER. SUBJECT SHOULD HENCEFORTH BE HANDLED SOLELY ON POLITICAL LEVEL.

3. AS FAR AS BUI DIEM'S PROPOSED VISIT IS CONCERNED, RIAD SAID HE WILL HAVE TO TAKE THIS UP WITH FAHMY. HE UNDERTOOK TO SEND A MESSAGE TO THE FONMIN IN WASHINGTON IMMEDIATELY APPRISING THE LATTER OF OUR TALK. RIAD NOTED THAT A VISA IS NO PROBLEM SINCE THIS CAN BE OBTAINED BY ALMOST ANYONE AT THE CAIRO AIRPORT. THE PROBLEM FOR THE GOE IS WHETHER OR NOT TO TALK WITH BUI DIEM WHILE HERE. I POINTED OUT THAT A REFUSAL TO AT LEAST TALK WITH BUI DIEM HERE IS HARDLY LIKELY TO MAKE RVN MORE RESPONSIVE TO EGYPTIAN OVERFLIGHT REQUEST. RIAD RECOGNIZED THE DILEMMA.

4. AS AN ALTERNATIVE, RIAD EXPRESSED PERSONAL VIEW THAT PERHAPS BUI DIEM SHOULD PROCEED TO WASHINGTON, WHERE HE COULD HAVE INFORMAL TALKS WITH GHORBAL. IF AS A RESULT OF THESE TALKS GHORBAL CONCLUDES A VISIT TO CAIRO MIGHT BE USEFUL, GHORBAL COULD SO INDICATE AND PERHAPS BUI DIEM COULD TRANSIT CAIRO ON THE WAY BACK.

5. RIAD STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT GOE DECISION ON HOW TO PROCEED MUST BE MADE TO FAHMY. HE ALSO NOTED THAT PRESIDENT SADAT MAY LATER TODAY SEE COPY OF HIS PERTINENT MESSAGE TO FAHMY AND FEEL IMPELLED TO ISSUE SOME INSTRUCTIONS ON THE SUBJECT. WE AGREED KEEP IN TOUCH. EILTS

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